

VA Health Care Network News



April 2000

News From Around the Network

Network 2's website was nominated by veterans to the TopGun 2000 awards, picking up First Place in the category of Government Sites. This annual competition enhances veterans' awareness of Internet resources. <http://theveteran.net/topgun/special2000.html>

The VISA 2 Website is highlighted in the January 2000 *Vanguard* magazine in the "Have You Heard" section, page 14.

April is Alcohol Awareness Month

April 9-15 is National Volunteer Week

May 1-7 is Public Service Recognition Week

May 6-12 is National Nurses Week

May 7-13 is National Hospital Week

The Diagnostics and Therapeutics Care Line hosted a Utilization Summit on February 22 in Syracuse. Network Care Line Leaders, Chief Operating Officers, Medical Center Directors and Physician Executives were invited to attend and tackle such issues as overused pharmaceuticals, standardizing laboratory practices, and imaging appropriateness in order to improve quality care, medical outcomes and reduce cost. Work groups were formed to develop measures, establish action plans and track results. D&T estimates a 2 million dollar savings if work groups are successful.

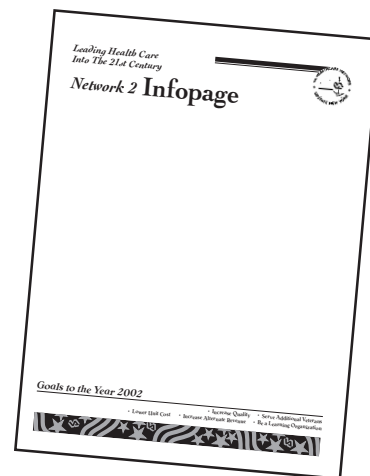
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Network 2's Signature Look

Network 2 now has a signature look that will help our veterans begin to easily identify important patient information from our health care system. The first and most important pieces that will have our new design are those communications products developed for Network distribution and targeted to go to patients. For example patient education materials.

The Network Print Shop at Bath, is ready to begin to use and print the new design and to assist employees/care lines in using it. A design/print form, is available on our web site at: vaww.visn2.med.va.gov/bath/graphicarts/ to help employees work through the development of their communications pieces. Any questions call Kathleen Laughlin at (607) 664-4851 or Richard Carpenter at (607) 664-4852, *Print Management Specialists* or Kathleen Hider, *Network Internal Communications* at (716) 241-2037. ♦



Fred Malphurs, Network Director, wanted to develop a design that would standardize and give a consistent look to our communications products. This would assist veterans in easily identifying Network 2 veteran health information. A work group was formed under Management Systems and a vendor was contracted to work up some designs. The designs incorporate the Network 2 logo, can easily be reproduced in black and white, full color, and establish consistency by standardizing the placement of the design. Here are a few examples of the new design.





HEADLINES

New Appointments in VISN 2



James P. Cody



Scot Dingman



Brian Stiller



Deborah Spath



Dr. Diane E. Wonch



Dr. Avery Ellis

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and for the employees and stake-
holders of VHA Network 2 Medical
Centers at Albany, Batavia, Bath,
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and their outpatient clinics.

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Program, Graphic Arts, Bath.



Sara Beckley



James M. Schlehr, M.D.



Tamara L. Holdcroft



Thomas C. Mahl, M.D.

James P. Cody has been appointed Director of the Syracuse VA. He was formerly the Acting Director at the Providence, Rhode Island VA.

Scot Dingman is selected as Network 2's Knowledge Officer. He has been with the VA since 1993 and was formerly a computer specialist. He holds a B.S. in Accounting from Marist College in Poughkeepsie, NY.

Brian Stiller is the Health Systems Specialist in the Network Office. Brian has been with the VA for seven years. He previously was the Staff Assistant to the Director at Bath. He holds a Masters in Health Systems Administration from RIT.

Deborah Spath is the Health Systems Specialist in the Network Office. Deborah is a registered nurse and has worked for the VA for 20 years. She held the position of Performance Manager since 1998.

Dr. Diane E. Wonch, CHES, C.Hy. is appointed Network 2 Patient Health Education Manager. Dr. Dee has been with the VA for 12 years as the Patient Health Education Specialist at VAWNY Healthcare System. Currently, she serves as a VA National Consultant in Primary Care Education/Managed Care, a VA Consultant in Expert Panel Staffing Methodology, and a National Stress Management Program Master Trainer.

Dr. Avery Ellis, Physician Executive at VAWNY Healthcare System, will represent the Network Physician Executives on the Executive Leadership Council (ELC) for one year.

Sara Beckley has been selected Network Manager for the Veteran Service Center. She has been with the VA for 20 years and was the former Health System Specialist for the Network Medical VA Care Line. Prior to that she was the Performance Manager at the Albany VA.

James M. Schlehr, M.D., Manager, Diagnostics & Therapeutic Care Line at VAWNY Healthcare System. He was formerly Chief of Radiology and Acting Chief of Staff at Lake City.

Tamara L. Holdcroft, MHA, VAWNY Healthcare System Medical VA Care Line Manager. Tamara's tenure as a Health System Specialist includes Medical Center, Regional, VACO, and VISN experience. Ms. Holdcroft holds an MBA/MHA from Xavier University.

Thomas C. Mahl, M.D. has been named Chief of Medicine at VAWNY Healthcare System. Dr. Mahl has been with VA for 10 years, 5 as Chief of GI. Board Certified in internal medicine and gastroenterology, Dr. Mahl is an Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine at SUNY at Buffalo.



NATIONAL VA NEWS



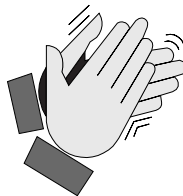
Secretary Togo D. West has committed the Department of Veterans Affairs to support at least 200 stand down events this year. All Network 2 Medical Centers are planning stand down events during 2000. Stand downs are designed to help homeless or at risk of becoming homeless veterans and their families at a one stop kind of event to access many immediate services such as food, shelter and clothing as well as medical and community services.

The Veterans Health Administration Garner's Praise Nationally

The Veterans Health Administration continues to garner praise nationally in its strides to improve customer service. The National Partnership for Reinventing Government surveyed veterans using VA hospitals and clinics and found 80% of the VA health care users were more satisfied than two years ago.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has moved into a leadership position when it comes to patient safety. Among the reasons the VA is being cited are:

- Its use of a bar coding system for medication similar to those used in stores. This has been found to cut medical errors by two-thirds. All VA medical centers will have this in place by next year making it the first health care system to do so nation wide.
- Its move towards using computerized patient records that remind health care workers of routine services such as immunizations and cancer screening.
- Using electronic entry of prescriptions to eliminate mistakes from illegible handwriting.
- Instituting in 1995 a performance measurement system designed to provide quality care and monitor adherence to clinical practice guidelines and measure clinical outcomes. ♦



Members of Network 2 staff and Partnership Council with Miss America, Heather French, at the recent National Coalition for Homeless Veterans Conference in Washington, DC, March 8-10, 2000. From left to right: Ellen Nesbitt, Coordinator of Veterans Services, NYS OTDA; Robert Van Keuren, Network Homeless Veterans Program Coordinator; Tom Cray, Executive Director, Veterans Outreach Center, Inc.; Miss America; Dr. Scott Murray, Director, Network 2 Behavioral VA Health Care Line; Jim Carra, Director, Monroe County Veterans Service Agency; Frank Falkowski, Executive Director, Western NY Veterans Housing Coalition.

The Frank Brown Berry Prize



The Frank Brown Berry Prize in Federal Medicine, sponsored by U.S. Medicine, is now open for competition. The Berry Prize competition is open to Federal health professionals from all fields - research, administration, clinical practice, etc. and recognizes an outstanding contribution to medicine from the Federal sector. The monetary award accompanying the Berry Prize has been increased to \$10,000. Nomination instructions have been distributed to each Medical Center Director and Human Resource Management Office. Instructions are also available at: <http://vhacoweb1.cio.med.va.gov/humanres/default.htm>.





NETWORK 2 BUSINESS REPORT

2001 Financial Outlook

Michael Finegan, Network 2 Chief Financial Officer, reported at the January ELC meeting on Network 2's 2001 Pro Forma Budget. Network 2 is happy to report we are in the black with a surplus of 16.9 million. However, Mr. Finegan did caution it is a preliminary glimpse of the budget and that there are still a few unknowns at this time such as impact of the millennium bill. This bill has provisions for expanding eligibility for long term care, increasing mental health services, and for urgent and emergency care. Final agency regulations are still in development so it may still be a while before the full impact will be known for VISN 2. ♦



Potential \$500 Incentive Award For All Employees

Network 2's Executive Leadership Council (ELC) agreed to the Goalsharing Committee's recommendation of a potential FY2000 \$500 incentive pay out to all employees if we achieve our Network goals. This year's Goalsharing program begins April 3 and ends September 30, 2000.

There are changes to the Goalsharing Program recommended by the Goalsharing Redesign Team. The Local Goalsharing Redesign (LGR) Task Forces are developing two goals involving customer service and enhancing employee development. The LGR Task Force will assist medical centers in organizing their employees into natural work units and help them in developing their own meaningful work unit goals. The employee work units will in turn select a third goal from one of the following areas: improve access to care, improve health care value or improve health status of veteran population. ♦

VISN 2 Goalsharing Redesign Team Co-Chairpersons:

Harry H. Ray (WNYHS) and Char Taft (Bath);

ALBANY: Nancy Battistello, Robert Steiner, Regina Tillman-Scott;

BATH: Esther Covell, Walter Dowdle, Beth Hutcheson, James Jenkins, Wendy Klem;

CANANDAIGUA: Mike Harris, Dennis Tepper, Dan Verstrete, Cheryl Wilsea;

SYRACUSE: Karen Cali, David Evangelista, Deborah Linda, Floyd Kuehnhoff, Joseph Ortolano, Linda Zavalas;

VAWNYHS, William Bogan (Batavia), Marilyn C.

Burkard, Ann Converso, Amy Ickowski, Kimberly Jones, Judith Kaczmarek, Colleen Murphy, Theodore Podkul, Karen Rodon.

Database Integration Update

Phase II April 1, 2000 Syracuse

Phase III July 1, 2000 Bath and Albany

<http://vaww.vsn2.med.va.gov/cslines/serviceline/is/dbi/dbiindex.html>



Harry Ray, Goalsharing Program Manager, and Marilyn Burkard, Program Support Assistant work on redesigning the program which will focus on working groups and improving the line of sight between local, Network and national VA goals.



PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

Network 2 Continues to Improve Access

VA Western New York Health Systems is opening three new CBOC's. Veterans living in Lackawanna will be able to receive care at Our Lady of Victory Family Care Center which is contracted with The Catholic Health System opening March 2000. Two more CBOC's will open soon after



The Syracuse VA announced plans to open a VA Outpatient Clinic at the Auburn Memorial Hospital. Over 8,000 veterans living in Cayuga County will now have access to primary care including mental health services. Pictured (L to R) are: Richard Kazel, Co-Manager of Medical VA Care Line; The Honorable James Walsh, U.S. Congressman N.Y. 25th District; and Christopher Rogers, Administrator, Auburn Memorial Hospital.

Lackawanna. The next site will be opened at Olean General, in a contract partnership around April 2000. The third CBOC will be located



at the Matthew Gajewski Family Human Services Center. This clinic is a contracted model with Erie County Medical Center expecting to serve veterans in the community surrounding east Buffalo. The tentative opening date is May 2000. ♦

A formal ribbon cutting was held marking the expansion of the Binghamton VA Outpatient Clinic. Pictured (L to R) are: James Cody, Medical Center Director at Syracuse; Margaret Dugan, Executive Director, Binghamton Psychiatric Center; The Honorable Maurice Hinchey, U.S. Congressman N.Y. 26th District; Dominic Prato, M.D., Clinic Director, VA Outpatient Clinic Binghamton; The Honorable Thomas Libous, member N.Y.S. Senate; (behind him) The Honorable Jeffrey Kraham, County Executive, Broome County, Richard Kazel, Co-Manager of Medical VA Care Line; The Honorable Richard Bucci, Mayor of Binghamton; Charles Hopkins, Veteran Service Officer for Broome County and Veteran Service Officer, County American Legion, and Sam Danial, Chairman, Onondaga County Veterans Advisory Board.



FYI

Canandaigua Behavioral Health is now partnering with St. Mary's Hospital in Downtown Rochester (Bull's Head area) to provide mental health services to veterans and their families.

Missed Appointments Hurt Other Veterans and Cost the VA

FYI to all Network Employees

From around the Network the following Medical Centers report for the first quarter (October, November & December) the number of primary care visit no shows.

ROPC	549
VA Western NY Health System (Buffalo)	1338
Canandaigua	298
Batavia	140
Bath	457
Syracuse	517
Albany	6,217



MORE NETWORK NEWS

Behavioral Health Jumps to Number 2

The VA National Mental Health Program Performance Monitoring System reports on key issues that address the delivery of mental health services. This monitoring system is an important part of the VA's efforts to be an organization that is focused on improvement in patient care quality and health outcomes, as well as maintaining high levels of accountability. The 1999 report shows that Network 2 is ranked second in the nation, a significant improvement since 1995 when Network 2 ranked thirteenth.

Mental Health Programs are assessed against clinical goals which focus on the transition from a hospital-based mental health system to a community-based health care system that is responsive to patient needs. Internal VA performance benchmarks to evaluate the work of each of the VA's 22 Networks is used, as well as data on more than seventy

measures in five major domains. The five domains on which performance is reviewed are:

- (1) population coverage / access;
- (2) inpatient care quality;
- (3) outpatient care quality;
- (4) distribution of resources to mental health programs; and
- (5) patient satisfaction.

Network 2 continues to provide the highest

quality care for its patients. Despite the significant fiscal challenges which resulted when the Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation (VERA) budget distribution allocated fewer dollars to Networks in the northeast, Network 2 has improved the quality of care and access to mental health services. With the continuing collaboration of the clinical care and management services lines and dedication of the Behavioral VA Health Care Line staff, the Network 2 Mental Health Programs will be recognized as the best in the country in 2000. ♦



Douglas Mace, Ph.D recently retired after 31 years with the Department of Veterans Affairs. His last position was Associate Chief of Staff for Education at the Albany VA Medical Center. He will be expanding his consulting business, specializing in Organizational Process Improvements.

"One VA"

Network 2 and Veterans Benefits Administration are collaborating and have developed performance standards to improve the customer service both agencies are giving. Standards include giving VBA better access to VHA medical records; when records are not available, a 30-day response time has been established, and a response time of 10 working days established for insufficient C&P exams.

Gregory Mason, Director Veterans Benefit Administration Buffalo Office, reported at the ELC in January, that VBA is receiving a number of appeals from several Network 2 facilities that are incomplete as well as late in being processed. VBA is willing and committed to provide retraining and work with each facility to get these cases moving through the system. ♦

TEAMWORK



IN THE NEWS

Participants Needed For Research Project

Network 2 was awarded \$750,000 from VA Health Services Research & Development Service to assess the effectiveness of a Health Education Program (HEP) for improving the well-being and reducing the health care utilization and cost of care of frail elderly outpatients, and for improving the well-being of their spouse

caregivers. HEP is a program for spouse caregivers. The study has important policy implications because it examines whether preventive health education groups offered

by the VA in a primary care setting can reduce health care utilization and costs of frail older veterans, while improving their well-being. The study is being conducted at Albany, Buffalo and Canandaigua. Project staff are seeking VA participants that are 55 years or older, cared for by a spouse or significant other who is experiencing stress in the situation. Please refer potential candidates to: Albany - Marcia Hernandez or Chris Muia (518) 462-3311 ext. 2824. Canandaigua: Janice Setera (716) 393-7632 or Benjamin Bergman. Buffalo: Sue Miller (716) 393-7633. The Project Coordinator is Linda Currie (518) 462-3311 ext. 2824, the Principal Investigator is Joe Engelhardt.



VAWNYHS staffers Leo Hill, EMS Manager; Bonita Reid, RN, NYSNA Vice Chair; and James Williams, SEIU Steward review all-employee survey. Becoming the employer of choice is the goal of the employee survey project piloted at WNY for implementation throughout the Network by increasing communication between employees and managers and identifying areas for improvement in work units.

Fabiane Erb, VAWNYHS Staff Assistant to the Director, addresses staff at "Learning the Tools for Customer Service," a 2-day expo on customer service program initiatives. Continuing education credits were awarded to the 350 staff members who attended the program. Fabiane is holding our new inpatient binder.



Network 2 Receives Grant to Study Alzheimer's Disease

The Central New York, Northeastern New York, Western New York, and Rochester chapters of the Alzheimer's Association and VA Healthcare Network Upstate New York have been awarded a grant of \$100,000 from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to test a new model of care for people with Alzheimer's disease and related disorders. This model, which incorporates the range of services needed by individuals and families affected by Alzheimer's

disease, is designed for use in health care and community services settings.

The main emphasis or goal of this new model of care is in training primary care physicians to recognize dementia and Alzheimer's and educate the patient and provider so the disease can be recognized early on and begin treatment sooner. There is no cure but if they could identify it earlier they could slow the disease process down. ♦





VA Western New York Health System Outreach Efforts Draw Praise

The premise is simple enough – a veteran's honorable discharge qualifies them for VA Healthcare. But working with veterans to get through the complexities of issues like enrollment categories, the means test, co-payments, insurance coverage, prescription benefits, etc. is a challenge faced by the Network Marketing and Communications Council in trying to increase N2's patient base. Their efforts drew praise recently from visiting staffers from Network 3, the New York Harbor Healthcare System, who had heard good things about N2 marketing programs. Robert Greene and Pamela Roerhrl, staff assistants to the director, visited recently with Arlene Kelly, Public Affairs Officer at VA Western NY, and assistants Evangeline Conley and Barbara Sellon. Of special

interest to the guests were enrollment events, taking the VIC (veterans ID card) equipment "on the road" to reach veterans in their own local areas. They liked the Ambassador Program, which encourages all staff to carry the VA message to veterans in the community. They liked *Veterans'*



Wellness, the N2 patient newsletter, and other special touches like WNY's marching unit. They were impressed with the Veterans Service

Center structure, adding its informational function to the marketing and outreach strategies, quickly processing enrollments and providing appointments to veterans.

Their kudos were shared with all N2 Council members who agreed they often take their own achievements for granted. Network 2 ranked 2nd for highest market share of Category A veterans in 1999, as well as ranking 2nd in increasing unique patients served.

Western NY is targeted this year, along with Monroe County, for greatest growth as areas of high veteran population density. ♦



Sam Feaster, Patient Services Assistant, discusses health care benefits with a veteran at a VA Western NY Healthcare System enrollment session.



VA Healthcare Network
Upstate New York